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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8015
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2009
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3668
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1526
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2329
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000318

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/ANP, DRL/AWH
NSC FOR E.PHU

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SUBJECT: PAPUA -- BOOK BAN STIRS CONTROVERSY

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Claiming it could spark public unrest, Indonesian authorities have banned a book by a previously unknown Papuan author. Papuan intellectuals and activists criticized the ban and promised to use it to generate international attention for their cause. There is little doubt that the ban is backfiring and giving the government a bad rap on a freedom of the press issue. END SUMMARY.

PAPUA BOOK BAN

¶2. (SBU) Indonesian authorities have taken an action which has stoked controversy in Papua. Late last year, the Jayapura prosecutor's office--which is under Jakarta's control--banned the book "The Sinking of the Melanesian Race: The Political Struggle in West Papua" by Sendius Wonda. Rudi Hartono, an official at the prosecutor's office, told the media that the book was "misleading and could spark unrest." Officials cited a 2007 Attorney General's circular authorizing the banning of books that could "disturb public order" as justification for their action.

¶3. (SBU) Officials confiscated copies of the book from local shops and the publisher's warehouse but did not demand that the public turn in copies which had already been sold. Authorities questioned the management of Deiayi publishers, the house that had produced the book, but have not charged them with any crime. Nor have officials charged the author, Wonda, with any offense (as of yet in any case).

¶4. (C) Wonda was unknown in Papuan academic circles before the current controversy. Although described as an academic in media reports, he actually works as a low-level civil servant at a provincial education office in remote Puncak Jaya district in the central highlands of Papua province. (Note: Despite repeated attempts, Mission was unable to obtain a copy of the book or to speak to Wonda directly. Papua-watchers at other embassies have experienced the same difficulties.)

WILD ALLEGATIONS

¶5. (C) To be sure, The book is not friendly to the GOI. Wonda's book makes a number of inflammatory and truly bizarre allegations against the Indonesian government, according to a

description provided to poloff by Rev Socrates Yoman, a Papuan religious leader who wrote the preface. In the book, Wonda charged that the Indonesian government deliberately introduced HIV/AIDS into the province as part of a campaign of genocide against ethnic Papuans. He also claimed that government family planning programs, transmigration policies and military operations were part of a systematic GOI campaign to "eliminate the Papuans."

¶6. (C) Poloff pressed Yoman for details about the book's alleged proof of these claims. He offered nothing beyond the tortuous conspiracy theories that are the stock-in-trade of some hard-line Papuan separatists.

FALLOUT FROM THE BAN

¶7. (C) While the book may be outlandish to the extreme, the ban on it has confirmed to some Papuans their none-too-latent suspicions regarding the Indonesian government's attitude toward the province. Professor Neles Tebay, a respected Papuan theologian, told poloff that he feared authorities would ban more books by Papuan authors. (Note: It is not clear whether Wonda's book is the first Papuan-related book ever banned by the authorities; it seems to be the first time the 2007 circular has been used in Papua, however.) Tebay, who has authored a number of op-ed pieces on the case, avoided commenting directly on the veracity of Wonda's allegations. He stressed that he was defending the principal of freedom of the press, not necessarily the content of Wonda's book.

¶8. (C) Since the ban was announced, Papuan activists have worked to generate external interest in the case. Papuan activist web sites have taken up the cause. So, too, have some media freedom groups, including the Australian branch of the international press NGO PEN. Both Yoman and Tebay told

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poloff that they would continue to press the case with international NGOs and foreign governments.

¶9. (C) Yoman claimed that copies of the book were circulating secretly in Papua. He also claimed that approximately 35,000 copies of the book had been printed--a number likely far beyond the capabilities of the very small publisher who produced it.

AN UNNECESSARY KERFUFFLE

¶10. (C) The decision to ban the book will almost certainly generate more attention for Wonda's wild claims. It is unlikely that the small Jayapura publisher which produced the book would have been able to distribute it beyond the small circle of committed Papuan independence supporters who already sympathize with its views. By banning the book, however, authorities have risked creating an international controversy over freedom of expression, when--in general--Indonesia's record in this area is quite good.

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